

# News Release

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Scientific Indicators Show Mixed Results on the Health of the Great Lakes**

**Hamilton – October 17, 2000** – The health of the Great Lakes is showing some improvements, but some areas remain cause for concern. Based on analysis of a number of Great Lakes indicators released this morning at the *State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC)* in Hamilton, the Great Lakes are showing improvements in some areas, holding their own in others and showing deterioration in others. The Great Lakes Basin contains one fifth of the world's fresh water, 16,000 km (10,000 miles) of shoreline, and 33.5 million Canadian and United States residents.

Scientists and decision makers from government, industry, Tribes (United States), Aboriginals, academia and environmental groups from Canada and the United States have assembled this week to share and review the latest research on the health of the Great Lakes. Paddy Torsney, Member of Parliament for Burlington, representing David Anderson, Minister of the Environment, opened the fourth biennial *State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference*, a conference hosted by Environment Canada and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. SOLEC 2000, runs until October 19, 2000 at the Hamilton Convention Centre.

SOLEC is the only forum where research and monitoring efforts from throughout the Basin are used to build an overall picture of Great Lakes health through the use of simple, easy-to-understand scientific indicators. Dozens of organizations and thousands of individuals routinely collect and analyze data, and report on parts of the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem. Through SOLEC, this data is then organized into an integrated and comprehensive package..

"Assessing the health of something as large and complex as the ecosystem of the Great Lakes Basin is a challenge," said Paddy Torsney. "I commend the experts for their dedication over the past eight years for providing a solid set of indicators to measure our progress towards a healthy and sustainable Great Lakes Basin. I would also like to thank the thousands of individual Canadians and Americans who support this work ."

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Scientists have found that while contaminant levels in fish and wildlife continue to decline, fish consumption advisories still remain in effect on all the Great Lakes. The

atmosphere is now one of the most important sources of contaminants to all the Lakes, representing some 90% of the total load of some chemicals. Many of these chemicals come from sources outside the Great Lakes Basin and indeed outside North America.

Habitat loss continues to be a concern, despite some local successes at rehabilitating degraded habitat. Non-native species continue to represent a major threat to the Great Lakes. This “biological pollution” includes Sea Lamprey, Zebra Mussels, Purple Loosetrife, Ruffe, Round Goby, Spring Water Flea and some 150 other species.

While the last SOLEC meeting in 1998 emphasized the development of core indicators to represent the state of major ecosystem components for the Great Lakes, the focus of SOLEC 2000 is on reporting on approximately 30 of the 80 proposed indicators.

Indicators are tools that will help decision makers understand what progress has been made and what other actions are necessary to fully address the complex problems facing the Great Lakes. These include not only issues such as excess nutrients, toxic contaminants, and habitat destruction but less recognizable problems such as the introduction of non-native species and atmospheric deposition of toxic chemicals.

Information gathered at SOLEC, coupled with other environmental information, will help measure progress towards the objectives of the *Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA)*. The Agreement is a formal commitment by the governments of Canada and the United States to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

“The Great Lakes are one of the most outstanding natural resources in the world” said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator Francis X. Lyons. “A healthy Great Lakes ecosystem is vital to the economies of the United States and Canada and to the millions of people who live in the basin. The State of the Lakes Conference is an important forum for sharing information and ideas on protecting the lakes”.

SOLEC provides an opportunity for an exchange between the five hundred Canadian and U.S. scientists and decision-makers attending. Sessions have been scheduled for participants to discuss a wide range of topics including: drinking water; fish contaminants; beach closures; wetlands; land use and socio-economic conditions. The conference papers, which will be revised and published for public information after the conference, will form the basis for future coordinated action both by governments and interested parties to further the rehabilitation of the Great Lakes.

Conference participants will also be discussing issues that affect the Great Lakes as a whole and individually, such as biodiversity, non-native species, population and

community shifts, land use, climate change and fishery management. In addition, they will be reviewing ways to make fish consumption advisories consistent across all the Great Lakes.

For more information on SOLEC or the Great Lakes, please visit “Our Great Lakes”, on Environment Canada’s Green Lane at <http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/>

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